A SPEECH

Delivered by EDWARD KING, Esq.

PRESIDENT

Of the Society of Antiquaries of London,

AT SOMERSET PLACE,

On the 23d of April 1784,

THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOCIETY,

Upon his quitting the Chair, in order to introduce the Right Honourable GEORGE Lord DE FERRARS, now Earl of LEICESTER, as their future President.

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GENTLEMEN OF THE SOCIETY,

I COME now finally to take my leave of this dignified ſtation, and to quit this ſeat of high honour, having been ſo fortunate as to have carried into execution, during the ſhort time I have ſat here, moſt of thoſe plans and purpoſes for the advancement of the true intereſts of the Society; for the augmenting and ſecuring its revenues; and for the adding freſh vigour and ſpirit to its operations and proceedings; the accompliſhment of which was my *ſole* inducement for venturing to take this charge upon me.

BUT, Gentlemen, before I depart, I think myſelf bound in duty to render to you ſome account of my conduct; and to explain more fully what have been my views.

IN the firſt place; I had obſerved, that, for a long time, in conſequence of a variety of circumſtances, the revenue of the Society had fallen ſhort of its due amount;——and unleſs certain neceſſary *regulations* were adopted, was likely to do ſo more and more every day; which would greatly controul and embarraſs the whole body, with regard to any uſeful and noble undertakings that might be propoſed, for the advancement of ſcience, or for the honour of our country, and of this illuſtrious eſtabliſhment.

THESE regulations, therefore, have been propoſed, adopted, and digeſted; and are now ſolemnly confirmed by the Act of your Council.

~~IN the next place;—it had long been obſerved, and greatly~~ lamented, that a certain degree of *languor* attended the proceedings, at the weekly meetings of the Society; and that, in conſequence thereof, a dark cloud of diſcontent and reſerve obſtructed thoſe beams of light, and thoſe lively, animated communications of ſcience, on the ſupplies of which, not only the *proſperity*, but the *very exiſtence* of ſuch a learned body as this Society does moſt obviouſly depend.

AND yet all this was occaſioned, merely for want of the obſervance of a *few forms*; and for want of exerciſing that power, given by our Charter, and our ſtatutes, of appointing a *ſufficient* number of neceſſary and proper officers, for the conducting and carrying on the buſineſs of the meetings, with activity and effect.

FORMS and ceremonies, Gentlemen, are undoubtedly, of themſelves, in the eyes of wiſe men, but trifling things; and of ſmall import: but nevertheleſs, as connected with, and conducting, and arranging, the management of all the affairs of life, they are perhaps of more real utility to the world than even the greateſt abilities, or the moſt conſummate knowledge: and the welfare, not only of this Society, but of all human ſociety whatſoever, depends almoſt entirely upon the *due* obſervance of them.—We live in an age, wherein we have had (in the world at large,) too ſad experience of this great truth:—and in our own leſſer corporate capacity, we have long ſuffered, for want of due attention to this matter.

Now, therefore, certain forms and ceremonials, (with regard to the election, and admiſſion of Members; and with regard to the

the mode of attendance, and the reſpective employments of your officers;—with regard to the proper compliments to be paid to thoſe who communicate papers and memoirs, or pieces of antiquity for inſpection;—and with regard to proper *notices* of all kinds to be given to the *Society*;) have been adopted and determined upon by your Council:—and, that there may be no miſtake, or omiſſions, for the future, all theſe regulations, together with certain others, are digeſted in one ſmall compilation, and printed; and are ordered to be delivered to every Officer, and to every ſucceſſive Member of the Council.

And whereas our worthy and reſpectable Secretary, Mr. Norris, has long, *too long*, had *alone*, and without any aſſiſtance, the fatiguing taſk, not only of keeping the Books of the Society, and of making all the Minutes, but alſo of Reading all the Papers;—(after returning due thanks to him for all his paſt labours; and after having, by your concurrence, obtained the appointment of another joint Secretary to ſit at the Table, both for the maintaining the more effectually the Dignity of the Society, and for the better carrying on its buſineſs) your Council have determined, that henceforth the Senior Secretary ſhall only make the Minutes, and take all the trouble of *Writing* upon him; and that the department of the *New* Secretary ſhall be, conſtantly to read both the Minutes, and whatever Papers are laid before the Society.

And, to add more effect and vigour to all your Inveſtigations of the Science of Antiquities; and to carry on all your reſearches with greater ſpeed; your Council, in conſequence of the Power you have veſted in them, have not only appointed *one* able draughtſman (Mr. Carter); but alſo a moſt ingenious, and excellent coadjutor, and joint-aſſiſtant, Mr. Sanders; that you may never be without the Power of preſerving the Memorial of

whatever Antiquities are ſubjected to your inſpection, and are at all deſerving to be recorded.

MEMORIALS, which I am perſuaded will be of the utmoſt importance to *future* ages; both becauſe, merely for want of ſuch notice being taken of them, many fragments of former times, pregnant with information, are almoſt totally unknown; and becauſe all *true* concluſions of Science muſt depend upon the collection of a *variety* of facts; and upon comparing *very many* remains and appearances of things, one with another; and cannot, (either in the contemplation of Hiſtorical Subjects, and the works of Antiquity, any more than in the contemplation of the works of Nature) be deduced, with ſufficient certainty, from any one ſingle obſervation or appearance.

THE Society's Collection of Drawings, therefore, thus made, and carefully preſerved; will, I truſt, in time to come, be of no ſmall uſe, towards the elucidation of that moſt important part of hiſtory, that relates to the progreſs of Arts, and of Science, and of Civilization.—And when it comes to be frequently referred to, will both give riſe to many curious diſquiſitions; and do juſt honour to this illuſtrious Body, and to our Country.

ALL theſe regulations, and new eſtabliſhments, I have had the honour, as a ſingle Member of this Society, with the joint aſſiſtance of a much reſpected Council, to bring forwards; and to have ſeen carried into execution; during my being in my preſent Office; of which, but for the ſake of effecting theſe purpoſes, I have ever deemed myſelf moſt unworthy.

BUT, Gentlemen, all this were ſtill but little; did I not, in the end, endeavour, moreover, to ſecure effectually the continuance of theſe advantages, and the means of your attaining ſtill greater.

GENTLEMEN,

GENTLEMEN, the dignity of THIS Society, and the luſtre with which (conſidering the uſefulneſs and importance of the inſtitution) it *ought* to appear, and indeed hath appeared in the eyes of all Europe, requires, that in order to give proper life and ſupport to the whole, there ſhould be placed at its head, a Man of eminent and diſtinguiſhed learning;---of worth and reſpectability of character;---of zeal and activity to promote its beſt intereſts;---and of high and antient dignity, capable of commanding every degree of reſpect, that not only the partiality of friends and fellow countrymen may wiſh to beſtow, but which the moſt prejudiced foreigners may alſo be compelled to yield.

IT is not every age that affords, by means of a concurrence of ſuch qualifications, ſuch an ornament to a country, when moſt wanted: but I am moſt fortunate to be able, without flattery, and merely in purſuance of a conſcientious diſcharge of my duty, to declare unto you, that ſuch a diſtinguiſhed character is at hand: and I eſteem it a fulfilling, moſt faithfully, the moſt important part of the truſt repoſed in me, as well as the happieſt circumſtance attending all my labours for the ſervice of the Society; that I am empowered to have the honor, by virtue of my office, to name, and to propoſe to you, on the houſe liſt, and to recommend to you, for election, as your future Preſident, Lord de Ferrars *.

THE fidelity with which I am perſuaded his lordſhip will diſcharge the duties of ſo conſpicuous a ſtation; and the honor he will unavoidably reflect upon the whole body, both by his diſtinguiſhed rank, and by the plans of conduct he will adopt, will, I am perſuaded, teſtify more fully the propriety of ſuch a choice, than any further words of recommendation, whatever, that I could preſume to make uſe of.

* Now created Earl of Leiceſter.

AND

And whilſt, by the favor, of our moſt Gracious King and Patron, we are ſeated *here*, on the moſt reſpectable eſtabliſhment that a learned body can be placed; I truſt, by advancing ſo noble and reſpectable a perſon to the head of the Society, you will ſtill further find, ſuch an increaſe of honor in the eſtimation of all the world, and ſuch an increaſe of zeal and activity to promote the ends of your inſtitution; that the great benefit of forming ſuch chartered incorporations, for the advancement of ſcience, will at length be fully and univerſally underſtood; and the *utility* and *dignity* of the Society be raiſed to ſuch an height, that its luſtre, in the eſtimation of all mankind, will, in proportion, as much tranſcend that with which it has hitherto appeared, as the preſent ſtate of ſcience ſurpaſſes the ſad condition wherein the world was held, in the days of dark ignorance.

But, Gentlemen, I cannot ceaſe here; nor think, I have ſufficiently diſcharged my duty; even by thus recommending a new and illuſtrious Preſident: --- I muſt return moſt ſincere, and cordial thanks (in which I am ſure you will join with me) to our worthy friend Mr. Topham, who (through a fervent deſire to promote the beſt intereſts of the Society) has voluntarily taken upon himſelf the trouble, on my firſt application, of becoming your Secretary, during the interval, between the adopting of the new regulations, and St. George's day; and has been indefatigable, both now, as well as heretofore, in his endeavours to make full enquiry into the ſtate of your finances; and to deſign and arrange, an effectual mode of ſettling your accounts, and of preſerving the utmoſt regularity in the method of keeping them for the future.

His many important avocations, of another kind, do not permit him to have leiſure to continue this aſſiſtance, in the ſame conſpicuous ſtation: and, therefore, he has acquainted me, that he muſt now reſign his office; --- but, at the ſame time, ſtill wiſhing to be effectually uſeful to the Society, he has prevailed upon a moſt worthy and able member of our body, to come forth, readily, to undertake this important office, (on the due execution of the duties of which a great part of our future proſperity depends) --- *Him*, therefore, from my own perſonal knowledge alſo of his great merit, great learning, and earneſt zeal to promote the Science of Antiquities, I venture to recommend to you, on the houſe liſt, as your future Secretary. The Gentleman I have the honor to name, on this occaſion, is the Rev. Mr. Brand, rector of St. Mary Hill, and librarian to his grace the duke of Northumberland, in the room of Dr. Percy now biſhop of Dromore. --- And I cannot but obſerve; that, as the ſalary of our new Secretary is ſo very inconſiderable, the emolument can be *no object* to any man of ſuch reſpectability as it is needful for us to have the aſſiſtance of; and that nothing but that noble enthuſiaſm of ſpirit, which is the moſt needful and effectual thing of all others to promote the advancement of Science, could induce any member of this Society to ſtand forth on the occaſion.

I MUST now beg leave, Gentlemen, before I cloſe this my final addreſs to you, to make a very few obſervations on the nature of our purſuits.

SOME men, of much learning and diſcernment, have been eſtranged from the ſtudy of antiquities, by obſerving, what they call, the dull unanimated purſuits of certain Antiquarians, who are continually ſearching amongſt rubbiſh, and bringing to light, in a wonderful manner, all the blunders of paſt ages; without

without aiming at any one uſeful end.--And other men (perhaps of ſounder judgement) are equally eſtranged, on the other hand, by beholding, with deſerved indignation, the faſtidious, pert conceit of thoſe, who affect a degree of refinement, which they believe, and hope, the reſt of the world cannot comprehend; and whoſe only view it is, to be able to look down, with an air of ſuperiority, and contempt, on the want of taſte, and of all elegant ideas, which they *fancy* they perceive in all, except themſelves; whilſt they idolize the works of remote antiquity; and do mankind the honor to ſuppoſe, that there are no beings, *now living*, hardly worthy to crawl upon the face of the earth.—Yet the prejudices of both kind of obſervers might be removed; and both theſe ſetts of Antiquarians, might become highly uſeful, if their purſuits were but once rightly modified and directed.—For as, on the one hand, the diligent reſearches of the former claſs, will furniſh the world with ample and *uſeful* materials, to become acquainted with the true and real ſtate of mankind, in different ages, and in different countries; ſo the *nice* diſcernment of the latter, will enable the world to ſelect, and to avail themſelves, of the benefit of every the *beſt* exertion of art, and of ſcience, in every age, and in every part of the earth: and nothing will be loſt.

Our forefathers, in the earlieſt periods, were many of them perſons of vaſt abilities, and of wonderful induſtry: and they deſerve our juſt admiration and applauſe; as they certainly did, in their day, carry many arts to the higheſt degree of perfection, which thoſe arts were, in their reſpective kinds, capable of. But many more arts, perhaps *more noble*, and *more valuable*, remain ſtill to be cultivated: and, by God's good providence, no doubt men of great abilities will hereafter be raiſed up, who

will avail themselves fully of all the advantages of their predecessors: and whilst they enjoy the benefit of the revival, will also justly value and improve their own superior rights and opportunities, for the noble purpose of cultivating properly, and of adorning the whole creation of the Almighty, more and more, to the [illegible]

Let us, therefore, strive, in our day, to bring to light every curious work of Antiquity; and to *profit* thereby: but let not a vain admiration of their excellence, depress our spirits; or quench that noble energy of soul, that should lead *us* to *excell*.

And, above all, let us be careful, whilst we admire their works, to avoid an approbation of that blindness and error, in the midst of, and in consequence of which, many of those curious specimens of art were wrought.

For shame, let it not be said, that whilst we do not *equal* their excellencies, we are willing to imitate, or assent to, their infirmities; or inclined to give the least countenance to falsehood, and error.

Let me venture, to recommend, that the great and principal pursuits of this Society should ever be, to bring *truth* to light;—to develop the true history of man;—to shew the gradual progress of the world, from darkness and ignorance, to light and perfection, through succeeding ages;—to shew the various ebbings and flowings of all these exertions;—and to ascertain the overruling hand of Providence, in the whole progressive work. To establish facts in history; that misrepresentations and falsehoods may fade away; and that, at last, mankind may know what *truth* is; and what the *best* improvements of human art, and science, really are: and enjoy the benefit of both.

AND now, Gentlemen of the Society, permit me, as your *President*, to bid you a laſt adieu.—May proſperity, and honor, attend you, on this preſent election; and in all your undertakings; for a long ſucceſſion of ages; when I ſhall be no more; but ſhall be numbered with your late worthy Preſident; whom though I mention *laſt*, I cannot eſteem *leaſt*; and whoſe zeal, and faithful endeavours, to be uſeful to the Society, can never be forgotten.